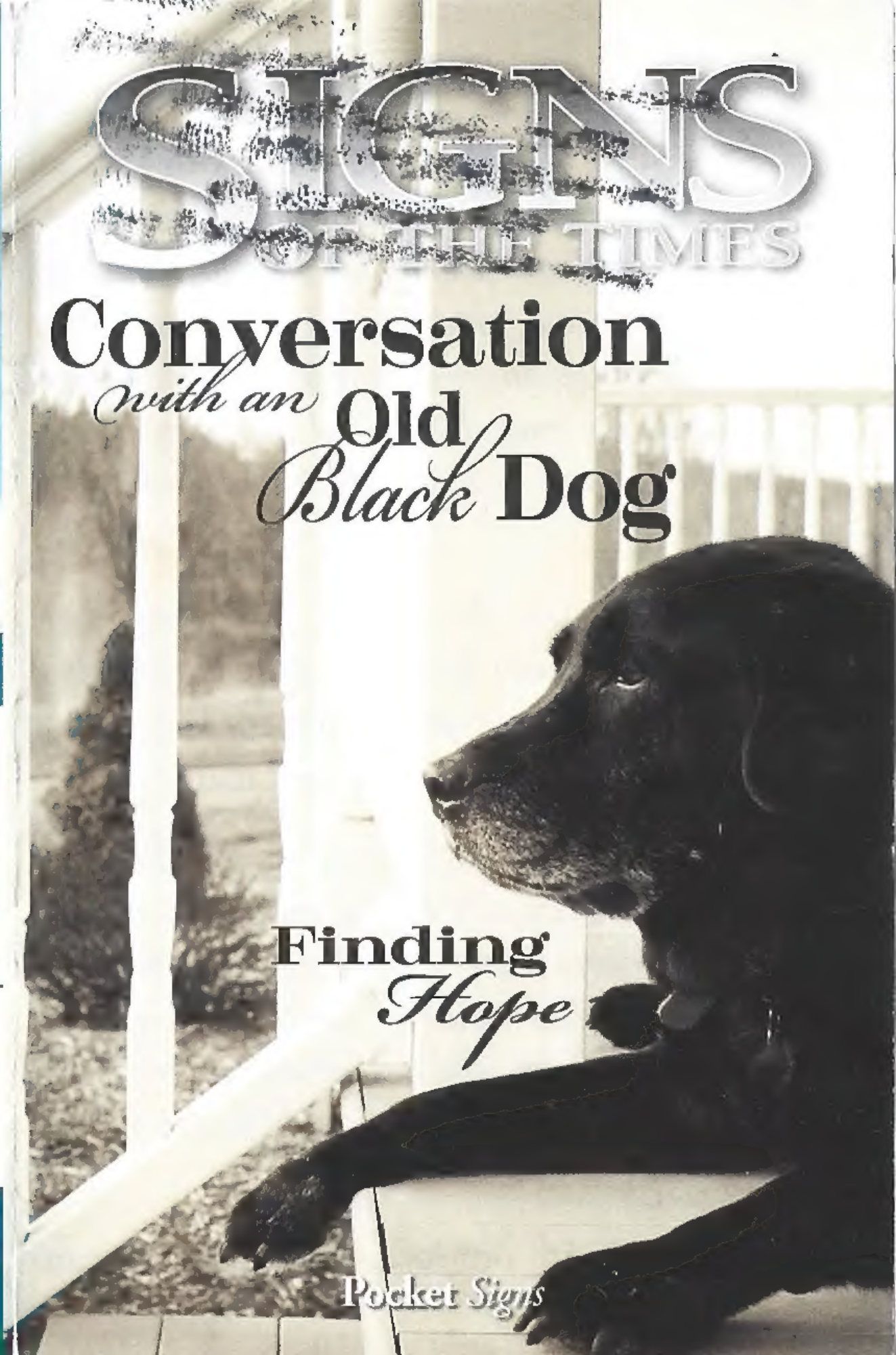
SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Conversation with an Old Black Dog



Finding Hope

Pocket *Signs*

The old man sat on the porch swing holding his cane in his right hand. Its tip touched the floor. With his left hand, he reached down and patted his dog on the top of her head. The last glimmer of daylight shown over the trees across the road. He pushed the swing lightly with his feet and let it rock back and forth as he mused.

I just lost my best friend. We buried her yesterday afternoon. Now, old dog, it's just you and me for whatever years we've got left. I may have a few more than you, but not many.

He watched the light fade in the distance, the silence broken only by the sound of a nearby mourning dove. Then he stood with the aid of his cane. He shuffled inside to the comfort of their warm front room and sat down in his worn leather chair. The dog followed him and sat on the floor beside him.

Well, old girl, our kids don't think we can

take care of ourselves. They think we're too old, and they may be right.

Her ears perked up as if not to miss a word.

Margaret's gone, and the kids think we're alone. That's really not so. I wish I could explain so you'd understand.

She whined, raised a paw, and put it on his left knee.

You snuggle at my feet and I'll try.

He pressed on her rump until she lay down.

The next time I see her she'll look even better than the day I married her. She was splendid that day. I wish you could have seen her. And I must add that she continued to get better as time rolled along.

But what made us so great together was our mutual best Friend. We can trust Him, because He promises to always be with us. We can't see Him, but He's here—has been for many years, and He knows us well. He even knows how

much hair you've lost all over the house!

Her tail thumped the floor.

A man named Paul—another of His friends—wrote, "I know in whom I have believed and He is able to keep what I have committed to Him."

Margaret and I made that commitment a long time ago, so I don't need to worry, because Jesus assures me that I'll see her again, and He always keeps His promises. He promised to take us to a place where we will always be with each other and with Him. These wrinkles, aches, and pains of the last few years will be gone, and we'll look and feel good forever. We'll get smarter and understand more about why you and I have to spend these few days alone.

She raised her eyes to his and gave him a mournful look. It seemed like she understood.

We had challenges, she and I. Sometimes we got mad at each other. I can still remember

saying some things I shouldn't have and wish I hadn't. But our Friend somehow always knew how to make the bad things turn into good things. When we asked Him, He always forgave our mistakes and wiped our sinful records clean. Her personality and character traits are all stored in His infinite mind. When I see her again, she'll be the same person I knew all those years. Those funny quirks, smiles, and expressions will still be there.

The times that seemed so difficult to us were not our Friend's doing. Yet He was always able to pick up the pieces and make things better than what they'd been before. He can do that because He's brilliant and able, and He loves us. He even loves old black dogs!

He reached down and patted her on the head.

Our Friend promised that when we trust Him, we've already crossed over from death to eternal life, and no one can ever pull us out of His strong hands. Best of all, it's a gift. We haven't earned any of it. It was His idea to do

this for us, and He's powerful enough to make it happen. There won't be any room for us to brag that we did even part of it. Well, there is one thing we *can* do. We can accept His gift and say, "Thank You."

She closed her eyes and rested her head on her paws. Her tail moved ever so slightly.

Are you wondering how we could have such a good Friend? Me too. Sometimes it seems just too good to be true. People tell us if something sounds too good to be true, it isn't. But they're wrong. This time it *is* true!

He reached over and picked up a black Bible from the end table next to his chair.

See this Book? I read it a lot. It's the best Book ever written, and it has the best news ever given to the entire universe. Jesus, our Friend, and His Father love us much more than we love each other. I know that seems impossible, but it's true. If we don't accept His gift, He's going to miss us forever. When He takes us to the homes He's

made for us, our tears will be wiped away. Yet I think He'll still cry when He remembers those who didn't come along with us.

He reached down and stroked the fur between her ears. She cracked her eyes open, then closed them, and let out a sigh.

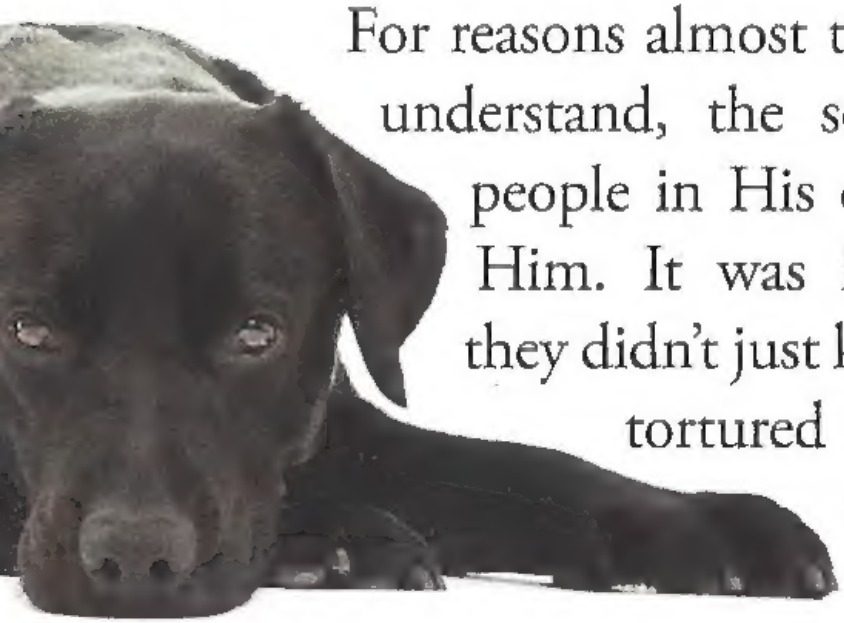
All this can happen because our Friend left His heavenly home and was born here just like you and me. In fact, you and I have had it better than He did. He was really poor. He worked very hard. I hope He had a great dog just like you.

He lived here for 30 years, and then He put away His carpenter's tools and spent the rest of His life telling everyone about His—and our—wonderful

Father. His Father always gets blamed for all the bad things that happen here. Jesus wanted people to understand that this just isn't so! The bad things are the result of our mistakes and the ways of evil people.

Jesus did marvelous things. He gave new eyes to blind people. He fixed people so they could hear and speak and see. He even raised dead people back to life again! Those miracles were samples of what He will do again for all of us who believe Him and accept His gift.

He looked at her as she lay sleeping at his feet and wished he could drop off to sleep as easily as she did. He thought maybe it was because she didn't know about growing old, so she didn't worry about it.



For reasons almost too difficult to understand, the so-called good people in His country killed Him. It was horrible! And they didn't just kill Him. They tortured Him. Yet He offered them

forgiveness. Our Friend is amazing beyond our ability to comprehend. I wish you could understand evērything I'm saying. Maybe you can. Maybe I'm the one not understanding!

He rose from the chair with the aid of his cane, hobbled back to the front door, and sat down on the porch swing again. She followed him and lay down beside him.

Our kids think we won't be able to make do. That would be true if we were alone. But we aren't! "Never Alone" would be a good name for our house, don't you think?

The stars were twinkling in the night sky. A cloud sliced the moon in half. A cool breeze blew across the porch, and a cricket chirped nearby.

Yes, I know. We miss her now, but it won't be long. This is what Jesus is all about. The story of our Friend is a story of hope, love, and never-ending assurance. Love and restoration is the theme of life itself. I wish you could understand, you great old dog, you!

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